NURTURE THE GRASSROOTS

Rashtriya Swayamsiddh Samman acknowledges the efforts of unsung heroes in their respective fields, says MANSI BHANSALI







If you want to bring about a change, you have to start from the roots was the belief that the founder of Jindal Steel and Power Limited (JSPL), the late OP Jindal, upheld all his life. While millions just talk about the social conditions of the underprivileged living with minimal facilities, there are a few who take the initiative to make a difference.

"I never thought that my initiative would reach so far. After my husband's death from a curable disease because of insufficient funds, I decided to open a hospital. Working as a vegetable seller, brick layer and house maid, I managed to bring up my four children and also build a hospital. I personally look after all the patients and ensure that no money is charged from them," said Subhashini Mistry, who is now owner of Humanity Hospital, and is changing lives with her solo determination.

Sunil Jain, founder trustee, Astha, who is differently-abled and does not have lower limbs, was dependent on many people to take care of him — his mother, school, friends and the whole world. "That's when I started looking at people with disability and wondering about the perspective of the care-givers. I wanted to bring the people with disability together to enable them to live a purposeful life," said he. This led to the formation of Astha in 1990. "Most of us live with a perception that there should be some ability to live an extraordinary life. But I'm here to defy that perception," he added.

It is to recognise such people that Naveen and Shallu Jindal, chairman and president of JSPL, respectively started the *Rashtriya Swayamsiddh Samman* in 2015. The response was overwhelming and JSPL organised its second edition at the Kamani Auditorium to felicitate 12 individuals and nine organisations for the work done by them at the grassroot level across India. "The courage, commitment and confidence of *Swayamsiddh* is an inspiration for all of us to overcome the challenges of life with grit and determination. I am sure these untold stories of courage will go a long way in inspiring others to work towards the holistic development of our great nation," said Naveen Jindal.

"The *Rashtriya Swayamsiddh Samman* aims to bring out stories that have yet been untold. Stories of determination and a will to bring about a change in the society. The *Samman* is an effort to salute these people and provide them with a national platform so that others too can take inspiration from them," added the director of the programme, Shallu Jindal.

Chaudhary Birendra Singh, Union Minister of Steel, handed out a cash prize of ₹ 1 lakh and the title of *Swayamsiddh Shri* in 11 categories to the awardees. The event began with Dr Prasanna Kumar Patasani, an MP from Bhubaneswar, being handed an award for his life-long contribution in the field of human development. Other awardees included Shalini Saraswathi, Uddhab Bharali, Sunil Jain, Subhasini Mistry, S Murugan and Gazi Jallauddin for their indomitable courage in innovation and technology, sports, health, public service and education category, respectively.

Under the organisation category, Maaghara Foundation Trust, Gramin Samaj Kalyan Vikas Manch, Khamir Craft Resource Centre, AAMYA, Haroon Mukati Islamic Centre, Astha and WE4YOU were some of the winners.

Through *Rashtriya Swayamsiddh Samman*, JSPL is trying to do its bit for the society by working with and encouraging people at the grassroots level. Apart from reaping monetary benefits, a business has to fulfill social responsibility as well. So JSPL is trying to make a difference too in its own way. Women are taught to make jute packets, beauty products, sanitary napkins and the like to make them self-sufficient and independent. It has taken initiatives in the realms of health, education, women empowerment, infrastructure, agriculture, sports, hygiene, environment, population stabilisation, disaster management, arts and culture. Self Help Groups like *Aprajita*, OP Jindal Community College of vocational studies and skill development and Veggie Kart, an initiative to help vegetable sellers rake in profits, are some of their CSR initiatives.